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"We are at war and transforming," Caldwell said. "We are deployed all over the world and the challenge is to be responsive to current commanders deployed and to our own future transformation."

"We could sustain everything we've got with every dollar we've got and not have anything for the future," Riggs responded. "A better question to ask is 'How are we going to balance the resources we have available?'"

MEG WILLIAMS is a Senior Editor/Writer and provides contract support to the Acquisition Support Center through BRTRC's Technology Marketing Group. She has a B.A. from the University of Michigan and an M.S. in marketing communications from Johns Hopkins University.

Army Acquisition Corps Task Forces Embedded in Iraqi Theater

Meg Williams

'Justice and McCoy' was a refrain heard often during the Acquisition Senior Leaders' Conference, Aug. 12-14. If you wanted to hear how the Army Acquisition Corps (AAC) went to war and helped warfighters succeed in Operation Iraqi Freedom, you needed to hear what Justice and McCoy had to say.

Both colonels commanded forward-deployed task forces with embedded combat acquisition soldiers in the tactical units. COL Nickolas G. Justice commanded the Information Management Task Force (TF). He is Project Manager for Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2), Program Executive Office, Command, Control and Communications (Tactical). COL Curtis L. McCoy, Project Manager, Bradley Fighting Vehicle Systems, Program Executive Office, Ground Combat Systems, commanded the Combat ASAALT - Southwest Asia TF Operations Center, or CAT Force for short.

When they first deployed, impressions of the AAC were less than optimal: "When I got over to theater we didn't have a good rap," McCoy said.

"The first time I met MG Thurman he said to me, 'You're one of those drive-by fielding type of PMs.'"

Justice further explained that to MG Thurman "drive-by fielding" means that you leave him with the equipment. It doesn't mean that you failed to complete your new equipment training (NET) or that you failed to bring all your equipment to the field. "What we as Project Managers consider a proper fielding doesn't cut it with him," Justice said. "He told me 'It's your equipment, you need to stay here and make it work.' What he was telling me is a story about building confidence in the Army that what we in acquisition do is great."

The acquisition personnel in theater quickly changed this perception by learning to think like soldiers — what

Justice referred to as "getting in the same foxhole as the warfighter." We built command centers, we brought Blue Force Tracking to the theater and we partnered with the Army Materiel Command (AMC), said Justice. They also provided NET, maintenance and operational support, and gave battle damage assessments to combatant commanders in the fight.

Acquisition's value-add to warfighters was its engineering expertise. "We brought engineering skills to the table no one else had," Justice said. "AMC is supply. When they look at us, it's as engineering talent."

Besides its agility in engineering, the CAT Force excelled in accelerated fielding, bringing the PATRIOT Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missile system, the Bradley M2A2 ODS (*Operation Desert Storm*), the FBCB2 Blue Force Tracking, the Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) M270A1, the command and control vehicle and Battle Control Vehicle weapon systems to the Iraqi theater.



Proudly wearing the Army Acquisition Corps patch are, from left, COL Curtis L. McCoy, COL Nickolas Justice, MAJ Jonas Vogelhut and MAJ Rod Mentzer who deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. (photo by Richard Mattox)

“Abrams, Bradley, Black Hawk, Apache and MLRS form an army of excellent platforms,” said McCoy. “Where did those platforms come from? They came from us! It offends me when I hear Abrams and Bradley referred to as ‘Legacy Force.’ Abrams and Bradley are the future force.”

McCoy also took issue with the press’s coverage of PATRIOT missiles. “The PATRIOT is king to me,” he said. In tag team format, Justice finished his story. “We were in the Command Center when the air defense system alarm went off,” said Justice. “We are standing here and so are our young soldiers because the PATRIOT worked.” The PATRIOT recorded a 100-percent probability of kill during combat.

Justice praised the young soldiers — majors and noncommissioned officers — who comprised the two TFs. “We’re underutilizing our officers,” he said. “Take advantage of these kids and give them more work to do than Powerpoint™ slides. I also used young master sergeants. I’d go anywhere with them.”

MAJ Jonas Vogelhut was an officer embedded with the 3rd Infantry Division. His mission was to install FBCB2 on 180 2nd Brigade tanks. His first challenge was to field a piece of equipment that soldiers didn’t think they needed.

“Their initial response was, we don’t need it — we’ve got map boards and we know how to use stickies,” Vogelhut said.

Vogelhut installed systems and trained soldiers to use them. When soldiers had missions, acquisition team members were there to answer questions. Vogelhut rode on the battlefield and saw firsthand the results of soldiers using the equipment he had installed.

“When the division started the process of the speed move to Baghdad, the division could move faster in the breach lanes because they knew where everyone was,” said Vogelhut.

Justice and McCoy reeled off a list of equipment that performed well during the war including the new Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology, the Javelin (which operated at a 96-percent operational

rate during combat), the Long Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System (LRAS3) (which helped distinguish between children playing and enemy targets) and Interceptor Body Armor. They praised the Mobile MOUT (Military Operations in Urbanized Terrain) facility, which was fielded within 38 days of receiving funding. Additionally, the Army’s mountain training solutions were so good that Navy Special Operations Forces were trying to get access to use these training solutions.

The two colonels suggested that AMC and ASAALT partner during future contingencies to ensure mission success and to better support soldiers. They also suggested that this organizational relationship be refined and formalized in support of future Joint Task Force missions.

Near the end of their presentation, McCoy turned sideways to the audience and pointed to his Army Acquisition Corps patch. “We issued this patch to all task force members over there and I’m proud to wear this patch,” he said.

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